

Quakertown Ministerium Update

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Today, January 24, the Bucks County PIT (Point in Time) Count is being held to determine how many people in the county are living unsheltered lives. The count will be taken by area shelters and people who are in the field, and the number counted will most likely be under-reported. Unfortunately, the Bucks County Emergency Shelter is the only full-time shelter in the county with about 75 residents, a third of whom are children. The waiting list for the shelter may have 150 people or more on the list. There is also a Code Blue Shelter in Quakertown that's open on nights when the temperature is predicted to be 26 F or lower. They provide a hot meal for supper, a bed in a men's room or a women's room, and a breakfast before closing at 7:00 AM the next morning. There are no children allowed in this shelter. They can house up to 25 people at night.

The problem is that as of the 2022 PIT count, there were 427 people documented as sleeping in emergency shelters, residing in transitional housing, or living outdoors. The figure was a 48% increase from the 2021 count-- and that number has surely risen significantly since then. When Pr. Dave Heckler, Chair of Advocates for the Homeless of Upper Bucks, recently asked how many students in the Quakertown School District were homeless, he was informed that there are currently 44 unsheltered children in the school district. The school administrator also expected several more students to lose their housing shortly. When the Upper Perkiomen Ministerium met with

the Upper Perkiomen School District in November, the school reported that they currently have 24 families struggling without shelter, and there are no local services for these families. The closest shelters for these families are in Allentown and Bethlehem.

Sometimes, people who are unsheltered may have friends or relatives that can house them for a time, and this is often referred to as "couch surfing". This becomes a way of life until they find their own housing or are living outside. When family and friend housing resources are no longer available, people live in their cars or in encampments. They hide in wooded areas, under bridges or behind a 24/7 store. A 24 hour store allows for access to bathrooms and other services at night. Along with the rising number of families with children who are unsheltered, there is also a growing number of elderly whose fixed income didn't rise fast enough to keep up with increased rent and inflation on food. As a pastor and the President of the Quakertown Ministerium, I struggle with knowing that I live and minister in an area where so many are struggling with inadequate housing or living on the streets because they lost their homes.

Both the Quakertown and Upper Perkiomen Ministeriums are working on finding places that can safely house and help restore our unsheltered neighbors back into affordable housing. That means providing a stable place to live while people find better employment and look for a place to live. This is also a challenge because the housing market lacks enough affordable housing for lower income people to live. There are many obstacles to finding a location. The first is a place that is

preferably donated for this purpose and easily renovated into a shelter, and the second is getting the community and local municipality to agree to have them as their neighbors and on property zoned for another purpose. With the talk of a recession and the past year of inflation, chances are this problem will only increase in the coming years.

The church has just ended the season of Christmas. Often pastors and churches talk about Jesus housed with animals and being placed in a manger because no one in the inn or local family was willing to house them. Jesus was born into homelessness. By the time the Magi visited, they found the child and his parents in a house, no longer homeless and living among the animals. Mary, Joseph and Jesus then fled to Egypt as refugees. Thanks to the gifts of strangers, they had the funds to afford housing once they got there. These gifts also allowed them the funds to support themselves while they were refugees in Egypt. There is a snow and rain event predicted for tomorrow and many will deal with this living in temporary/outdoor shelters. I ponder where is my part and the part of the local church in people suffering this way. Am I like the innkeeper or the family members who have no room for the unsheltered in or near my home? Or am I like the Magi, willing to sacrifice time and resources to give the gift of shelter and hope to others in need?

Rev. Denise Fry, MSW
President of the Quakertown
Ministerium
Rev. David Heckler
Chair of AHUB

The Church that Sends... (cont.)

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 relevant to my life. I wouldn't have gone had they added percussion and a kickin' electric guitar to the prayer chants. Islam was a completely foreign world, and one in which I knew I clearly didn't belong. So, I didn't go.

I take that back. I did visit the mosque one time, because a Muslim friend invited me, and I wanted to honor him by learning more about his life and faith. It was an unmitigated disaster. First, we had to sit in weird, uncomfortable positions for extended periods of time. And everyone but me seemed to know what to say at various points of the service. They would all suddenly stand up, in unison, leaving me clamoring to get to my feet, which was hard when you couldn't feel your legs anymore. They all dressed in the same outfit, and my Nike shirt and Levi jeans made me feel pretty out of place. At one point they sang out an "Amen." At that point I thought I knew the drill, hearkening back to my days in a country Baptist church. So I hit the harmony note. No one else deviated from the primary note. Everyone turned to stare at me. I felt like a side of bacon at a bar mitzvah.

It was an awful experience, and although my friend invited me back several times, I always managed to find a reason to not be able to go. The mosque was a portal to a completely different world, and I didn't have an Islamic faith that would compel me to put up with the discomfort required to learn the unfamiliar ways of that world. This is a bit what it is like for people in the post-Christian West as they look into the Christian church. A British friend of mine, Steve Timmis cites a

recent study in Great Britain in which 70 percent of the Brits declare that they have no intention of ever attending a church service for any reason. Not Easter. Not for marriages. Nor for funerals or Christmas Eve services. For more than two-thirds of the people in Great Britain, nothing will carry them naturally into a church. In light of this, Steve comments:

"That means new styles of worship will not reach them. Fresh expressions of church will not reach them. Alpha and Christianity Explored courses will not reach them. Great first impressions will not reach them. Churches meeting in pubs will not reach them.... The vast majority of un-churched and de-churched people would not turn to the church, even if faced with difficult personal circumstances or in the event of national tragedies. It is not a question of "improving the product" of church meetings and evangelistic events. It means reaching people apart from meetings and events."

Great Britain is a few years ahead of the United States in secularization, but judging by the rapidly increasing percentage of those reporting "none" for religious affiliation, I believe we will be there before too long. This means that if we don't equip our people to carry the gospel outside of our meetings, our events, our gatherings and programs, we are going to lose all audience with them. A few flashier and flashier mega-churches will likely keep fighting for larger pieces of a shrinking pie. Yet there is another alternative: we can grow the pie. But that means teaching our people to engage people outside the church.

So how are we doing Swamp? I'm always excited when I hear stories of our people living this out, and I believe God is on the move in this current season where there are undeniable opportunities and doors that the Spirit is opening and orchestrating for us to engage people outside the church. As it says in Revelation 3:8- "I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." Let's continue to be kingdom minded and grow in our passion to focus more on our sending capacity than our seating capacity... amen?

Trustees Update

We installed a new commercial dishwasher in the Kitchen recently. The motor on the 30+ year old dishwasher was bad, and no replacement was available. The new dishwasher functions pretty much the same as the old one, except the soap and rinse aide is automatically injected into the wash cycles, so we no longer need to manually put in soap. There is also a button on the door that needs to be pushed to start a wash cycle now that was not on the old one. If you ever need to get instructions on how to operate the new dishwasher, call Ken Longacre or Terry Landis.

Both boilers were recently serviced. We did have some issues with sludge buildup in the 1,000 gallon tank for the large boiler, but we pumped out some sludge from the bottom of the oil tank and added treatment to the tank, and it seems to be okay now.

Please let one of your Trustees (Ken Longacre, Terry Landis, Brian Rush, and/or Will Sadler) know if you see anything that needs attention.